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	Inventors; and Inventors; and Inventors/Applicants (for US only): LYAMICHEV, Victor, I. RU/US); 2523 Carriedale Court, Madison, WI 53711 (US). KAISER, Michael, W. (US/US); 2206 Frisch Road, Madison, WI 53711 (US). LYAMICHEVA, Natasha (RU/US); 2523 Carriedale Court, Madison, WI 53711 (US).		Published: — without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

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(57) Abstract: The present invention provides novel cleavage agents and polymerases for the cleavage and modification of nucleic acid. The cleavage agents and polymerases find use, for example, for the detection and characterization of nucleic acid sequences and variations in nucleic acid sequences. In some embodiments, the 5° nuclease activity of a variety of enzymes is used to cleave a target-dependent cleavage structure, thereby indicating the presence of specific nucleic acid sequences or specific variations thereof.